

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 06097 01 OF 02 251031Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 ARA-10 IO-13 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7808
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC
CINCEUR
USDOCOSOUTH
COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 6097

MILITARY ADDRESSEES FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MARR, CENTO, XD, UR
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN DEBATES ITS CENTO TIE

REFS: (A) NEW DELHI 9658, (B) ISLAMABAD 6066, (C) ISLAMABAD 5858,
(D) ANKARA 4264, (E) LONDON 6145, (F) ISLAMABAD 5631,
(G) ISLAMABAD 4693 (ALL REFS NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: CHANGES IN THE SOUTH ASIAN BALANCE GROWING OUT OF
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 06097 01 OF 02 251031Z

THE APRIL REVOLUTION IN KABUL, WHICH BROUGHT A COMMUNIST-CON-
TROLLED REGIME TO POWER AT PAKISTAN'S DOORSTEP, COMBINED WITH
THE LURE OF GREATER SUPPORT FROM AND INVOLVEMENT WITH THE
NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM), HAVE REVIVED DEBATE WITHIN
PAKISTAN OVER THE VALUE OF THE COUNTRY'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE
CENTRAL TREATY ORGANIZATION (CENTO). GOP SPOKESMEN, WITHIN
THE CENTO CONTEXT AND BILATERALLY, HAVE REPEATEDLY VOICED

THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE ALLIANCE, URGING THAT IT EITHER BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE OR BE ABANDONED. FOR MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE PAKISTANIS, IT IS AN OLD, SAD, AND HAUNTINGLY FAMILIAR REFRAIN. END SUMMARY.

2. PAKISTAN IS DEBATING ANEW THE VALUE OF ITS INVOLVEMENT IN CENTO, COMPARING THE BENEFITS VERSUS THE COSTS TO IT OF CONTINUING ITS COMMITMENT TO THE ALLIANCE. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE IS THE APRIL REVOLUTION IN KABUL, BUT OTHER RECENT EVENTS HAVE CONSPIRED TO FOCUS NEW ATTENTION ON THE LIMITATIONS AND DISABILITIES OF PAKISTAN'S CENTO CONNECTION.

-- THE KABUL COUP RAISED THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOVIET PRESSURE COULD BE PLACED ON THE GOP TO RENOUNCE THE CENTO CONNECTION IN ORDER THAT PAKISTAN MIGHT REMAIN ON "GOOD TERMS" WITH MOSCOW. A SOVIET EMBASSY COUNSELOR HAS DENIED RECENTLY (IN A LONG CONVERSATION WITH POLCOUNS) THAT THE USSR IS PRESENTLY PUTTING PRESSURE ON ISLAMABAD TO QUIT CENTO. WHILE THAT MAY BE TECHNICALLY CORRECT, THE GOP KNOWS WELL THAT ITS CENTO RELATIONSHIP HAS LONG BEEN CITED BY MOSCOW AS AN IMPEDIMENT TO IMPROVED SOVIET-PAK RELATIONS; AND SOVIET AMB AZIMOV'S WIDELY PUBLICIZED APRIL INTERVIEW MADE PRECISELY THIS POINT (REF G). THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WILLING TO ARGUE THAT RENOUNCING CENTO TO PLACATE THE SOVIETS MIGHT BE IN ISLAMABAD'S BEST INTEREST. AS WE HAVE REPORTED (REF F), SEVERAL PRESSURES ARE NOW AT WORK ON THE GOP TO EXERCISE A LIMITED SOVIET OPTION; LEAVING OR THREATENING TO LEAVE CENTO MIGHT BE SEEN IN SUCH A CONTEXT.

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 06097 01 OF 02 251031Z

-- AS A RESULT OF BHUTTO-ERA INVOLVEMENT, PAKISTAN FEELS A GROWING AFFINITY OF INTEREST WITH THE NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES. THE NAM, WHICH HAS GROWN IN SIZE AND INFLUENCE ON THE WORLD STAGE, PROMOTES STANDS ON NORTH-SOUTH AND OTHER ISSUES WITH WHICH PAKISTAN NATURALLY SYMPATHIZES. THE GOP, MOREOVER, COULD HOPE TO USE NAM SUPPORT AGAINST SOVIET OR AFGHAN PRESSURES. PAKISTAN HAS CONSISTENTLY BEEN DENIED ENTRY TO THE NAM, HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE CENTO TIE (REFS A AND B).

-- THE GOP HAS LATELY ALSO HAD A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF A LACK OF US RESOLVE IN AFRICA, IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND IN SOUTH ASIA. THE GOP SENSES THAT THE LIMITATIONS OF US PARTICIPATION IN CENTO SIGNIFY A LACK OF REAL INTEREST IN THE ORGANIZATION, AND ISLAMABAD KNOWS THE OTHER WESTERN POWER IN CENTO, THE UK, HAS LITTLE TO OFFER.

-- THE GOP'S RELATIONS WITH IRAN, WHILE STILL VERY CLOSE, MAY APPEAR MORE FRAGILE TO ISLAMABAD AFTER THE ROUGH SAILING THIS YEAR CAUSED BY UNRETRACTED IRANIAN BULLYING ABOUT THE FATE OF FORMER PM BHUTTO, AS WELL AS THE GOP'S FEARS OF AN EMERGENT TEHRAN-NEW DELHI AXIS.

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 06097 02 OF 02 250333Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 6097

MILITARY ADDRESSEES FOR POLADS

3. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THE ONLY REALLY NEW ELEMENT
IN PAKISTAN'S NEW DEBATE ON THE VALUE OF ITS CENTO LINKAGE
IS THE AFGHAN SITUATION. GOP UNHAPPINESS WITH CENTO IS
NOT A RECENT PHENOMENON; IT HAS A LONG HISTORY, AND EVERY
MAJOR PARTY IN PAKISTAN HAS LONG BEEN COMMITTED TO PAKISTAN'S
WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ALLIANCE.

4. IN AN HISTORIC SENSE, THE GOP ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CENTO RELATIONSHIP

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 06097 02 OF 02 250333Z

CAN BE DESCRIBED AS A CASUALTY OF CHANGES WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN THE

WORLD, IN SOUTH ASIA, AND IN PAKISTAN SINCE PAKISTAN JOINED THE BAGHDAD PACT, TO BECOME CENTO, IN THE FIRST DECADE OF ITS LIFE AS AN INDEPENDENT NATION. IT SOUGHT IN THE PACT AN ANSWER TO ITS OWN SECURITY

CONCERNS VIS-A-VIS INDIA AND TO THE SECURITY CONCERNS IT HAD INHERITED FROM THE BRITISH VIS-A-VIS AFGHANISTAN AND THE USSR. IT SOUGHT

ALSO TO USE THE PACT TO REINFORCE ITS TIE WITH THE US.

5. THE ARRANGEMENT HAS NOT FULFILLED THE HOPES PAKISTAN HAD FOR IT, HOWEVER. IN TWO CONFLICTS WITH INDIA, THE CENTO RESPONSE TO THE PRESENCE OF INDIAN "INVADERS" ON PAKISTANI SOIL HAS BEEN WEAK AND INSUBSTANTIAL. IN THE SECOND OF THOSE CONFLICTS, THE 1971 FIGHTING WHICH RESULTED IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF EAST PAKISTAN INTO THE NEW NATION OF BANGLADESH, PAKISTAN INTERPRETED INDIAN ACTIONS AS THOSE OF A SOVIET PROXY, A SUSPICION ORIGINATING IN THE 1971 INDO-SOVIET AGREEMENT. WHILE CENTO INACTION DURING THE INDO-PAK CONFLICT OF 1965 WAS LAMENTABLE, AS SEEN FROM ISLAMABAD, IT WAS PERHAPS UNDERSTANDABLE; PAKISTAN, AFTER ALL, HAD PROVOKED THE CONFLICT. BUT CENTO INACTION IN 1971, WHEN PAKISTANI TERRITORY WAS INVADDED BY WHAT ISLAMABAD REGARDED AS A SOVIET PROXY WAS, TO PAKISTAN, INEXCUSABLE. THE MUSHINESS OF CENTO'S RESPONSE THUS FAR TO PAKISTAN'S HEIGHTENED SECURITY CONCERNS SINCE THE KABUL COUP, AND THE CONTINUING INABILITY OF PAKISTAN TO OBTAIN SOPHISTICATED AMERICAN ARMS IT HAS SOUGHT -- FOR PAKISTANIS A PART OF THE VALUE OF THE CENTO CONNECTION -- DRAMATIZE, IN PAKISTANI EYES, THE CONTINUING FAILURE OF THE ALLIANCE TO MEASURE UP.

6. AND THIS MOOD IS COMPOUNDED BY WHAT MIGHT BE TERMED A GREATER SKEPTICISM ABROAD ABOUT THE VALUE OF THE MILITARY PACTS WHICH ORIGINATED IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE 1950S -- THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 06097 02 OF 02 250333Z

NOW-DEFUNCT SEATO INCLUDED -- AS WELL AS A CONCERN ABOUT THE PRICE PAKISTAN PAYS, IN NOT BEING ABLE TO JOIN SUCH GROUPS AS THE NAM, BECAUSE OF ITS CONTINUING CENTO MEMBERSHIP.

7. COMMENT: WE SEE A CONTINUING DECLINE IN ISLAMABAD'S BELIEF IN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAK-CENTO LINK, EVEN AMONG THOSE IN THIS MILITARY GOVERNMENT WHO ARE STILL FRIENDLY TOWARD THE TIE. ALTHOUGH THIS GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY NOT RELISH TAKING A TOUGH DECISION LIKE LEAVING CENTO, AND CMLA ZIA HAS TOLD THE AMBASSADOR SIX MONTHS AGO THAT HE INTENDED TO LEAVE TO A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT ANY DECISION ON CENTO, CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT ULTIMATELY MAKE A FURTHER DOWNPLAYING OF THE RELATIONSHIP, OR EVEN A RENUNCIATION, SEEM NOT SO RADICAL OR DIFFICULT. IN A RECENT CONVERSATION, MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL AMIR USMAN WHO DOES CENTO AFFAIRS,

TOLD POLCOUNS THAT AN MFA STUDY "IS NOW UNDERWAY" ON THE PAK-CENTO

RELATIONSHIP. USMAN SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE STUDY IS NOWHERE NEAR COMPLETE AND THAT "NO DECISIONS ARE IMMINENT.." KNOWING, HOWEVER, THAT THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS OF LEAVING CENTO WOULD BE MANAGEABLE, A FOLLOW-ON TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT MIGHT DECIDE THAT THE ADVANTAGES OF MAKING AN ACCOMMODATION TO THE SOVIETS (EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER A PROMISE OF SOME TYPE OF RECIPROCAL MOVE FROM MOSCOW)

AND/OR THE BENEFITS OF NAM BACKING AS A RESTRAINT ON THE SOVS/AFGHANS, MIGHT MAKE CENTO A MORE EXPENDABLE ITEM ON THE GOP'S SHELF.

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